

Armor's Role in the Future Combined Arms Team

by Lieutenant Colonel Kevin C.M. Benson

The question is, "What will maneuver forces bring to the future battlefield?" In numerous journals and on TV talk shows, writers and military pundits say that we are on the verge of a "Revolution in Military Affairs." Whether this is true or not, a reflective professional force must try to look dispassionately upon the current world, imagine the future, and project roles for the profession of arms. Within this reflection and the question posed above are multiple levels of detail, ranging from "What will the combined arms team of the future look like?" to "Do we have to gain and hold ground to 'win' the next war or protect a vital national interest?"

The current raging debate within the Armored Force began with a very informative piece on the Division Advanced Warfighter Experiment (DAWE) being held at Fort Hood. Brigades with continuous situational awareness are destroying divisions. Long-range fires are the key to victory. Done completely in simulation, it is "showing" that a new definition of maneuver may be "that which allows the commander to place his artillery in the most advantageous position to destroy enemy forces without resorting to the close fight." The roots of this entire effort — the emergence of separate deep and close battles — can be found in the early writings of the "Boat House Gang," who brought us the 1982 edition of *AirLand Battle*, GEN Starry's ruminations on Follow-On Force Attack (FOFA), and the concept of simultaneous deep and close battle. Let us examine this emerging definition of maneuver and what it means to the combined arms team and Armor.

What seems to be developing in DAWE is the ability to defeat opponents outside of direct-fire range. In DAWE, maneuver is translated as the ability to position indirect fires (and attack aviation) relative to the enemy. Is this new and different from conventional wisdom? Yes and no. Those of us who watched the Gulf War from the sidelines should remember Secretary of Defense Cheney speaking in terms of a joint combined arms team when he talked of ground maneuver enhancing the effectiveness of air-delivered fires. In terms of the Army Force XXI fight, indirect fires are supposed to do a great majority of the killing and, from the lens of DAWE, appear to be on the edge of becoming the primary means of defeating/destroying the enemy. Practically, while I will never completely agree that

we can do *all* our killing from long range, there are a number of reasons why we should break up the cohesion of the enemy force prior to us closing and completing the task with tank cannon fire.

From reading some reports on DAWE, it seems that there are two stages within decisive ground operations; shaping operations and initial decisive operations. In these stages, armor and infantry forces are used primarily to secure artillery firing positions and, I infer, attack aviation FARRPS. These heavy forces attack only if necessary to complete the destruction or defeat of the enemy. The armored and mechanized infantry then is not used so much as a decisive maneuver force, but as a maneuver mopping-up force.

I agree that armor and infantry need to look at new ways of integrating decisive maneuver into non-linear operations. I also agree that the advances in indirect fire systems and attack aviation will change how we fight. The central fact remains that simulations are just that, and decisive maneuver of ground forces will, I believe, remain essential to decisive victory. Frankly, I just don't see how we can defeat the enemy without maneuvering ground forces in a combined arms fight, culminating with direct fire engagements. Unless, and until we can completely divorce ourselves from the line of communication required to sustain a modern force, maneuver will be required to both protect our own LOC and turn the enemy off of his. Again, this maneuver enhances the effectiveness of air-delivered fires as well as artillery-delivered fires.

The disadvantages of stand-off and fight are that we can do this until our unmanned sensors are blinded by lasers, our MLRS batteries are caught by tactical ballistic missiles, our attack helicopter battalions run into ADA ambushes, or it rains, snows, or fogs up. Then we must have the capability to roll out a combined arms team and take the battle to the enemy. Close combat is what assures victory.

Since the dawn of man, warriors have sought the means to kill at longer ranges, avoiding the calamity of close combat. Army AirLand battle weaponry and doctrine, Air Force strategic and interdiction bombing campaigns, even some elements of our nuclear arsenals are attempts to kill the enemy deep to take pressure off of, or even obviate the need for, the close combat forces. The concept which is

emerging from simulations, though, is very clear and attractive. Why close with the enemy when you can defeat him from a distance? Close combat, high casualties, the confusion of the melee, the disadvantages of the decisive engagement (ability to disengage, reposition, etc.) should be avoided. Separation of close combat forces is desirable; to close with the enemy is undesirable. In the offense, closing with the enemy in the direct-fire mode is best kept for mopping up the battlefield, a task which must be completed quickly so the armored heavy force can get out front to secure more firing positions.

We must ask ourselves, "Is the general concept of defeating/destroying an enemy from a distance a good idea?" We will have to admit that, from the time of the bow and arrow (Crecy and Agincourt spring to mind), the commander's objective has been to break up enemy formations at a distance, thus making the close fight easier or unnecessary. We must also recognize that the concept has a downside — a heavy reliance on sensors to define a battlefield and indirect fires to dominate the enemy. The inclination to the asymmetrical approach could lead our next opponent to use a low yield airburst tactical nuclear weapon to fry our "off-the-shelf" appliqué computers with EMP. Voilà, loss of advantage. Why, though, is the silver bullet of killing impersonally at long range attractive?

There is an American tendency to look for a fast, cheap — in terms of American lives — way to win, (look at the newest world champions of baseball), like the high-tech air force. The high-tech sensor/shooter fight is sexy, clean, and steeped in the tradition of our firepower-based army. Following the logic of sensor-shooter link and kill at long range, the division deep fight and close fight have melded as simply "the fight." What is now defined as a division deep operation is subsumed within the commander's battlespace due to the technology of existing and developing systems. Since "the fight" generally occurs outside of direct-fire range, but is not a separate deep fight, what appears to be developing is a "middle/long" distance fight. With the advanced fires capabilities being demonstrated in the DAWE, the commander does not have to fight simultaneously in the conventional sense of the term. Long-range artillery fires can continually attrit an attacking or defending enemy until what remains of the enemy force eventu-

ally reaches the close combat area, where he is greeted with a hail of Hellfires and maybe even a sabot or two. Therefore, simultaneous attack becomes continuous attack.

Over-reliance on artillery-delivered fires may sound like WWI all over again. The main killer in our grandfathers' war was artillery-delivered firestorms. Lines of trenches were built, at least partially, to protect both the infantry and the indirect fire assets. The stalemate in the trenches was overcome in 1918, first by the Germans using combined arms assaults of infantry and artillery (Hutier tactics), and then by the Allies using combined arms offensives of infantry, armor, and artillery (Cambrai). Although history shows us that fire alone is not the answer, it seems that the combined arms fight still has a long way to go with coordinated actions of infantry, armor, artillery, and attack helicopters. Having maneuver formations follow closely on the heels of long-range artillery fire will have the greatest effect and is not a new concept.

It is hard to think of a mission, other than full armored combat in the desert, where we will be able to use long-range indirect fires with impunity. The risk of collateral damage and fratricide will prevent the full use of these assets. How would an MLRS battery 30 kms away, directed by an unmanned sensor, help in the following situations:

- Light infantry surrounded in the streets of Mogadishu.
- Preventing a mob of Bosnian Serbs from destroying a Muslim village.
- Ejecting the Panamanian Defense Forces from Panama City.

Our Armored Force and Army will have to test these concepts in many ways, not with a "HU-AH, Can Do!" attitude, but one which will really test the concepts, and perhaps, upset a branch's rice bowl.

Simulated, computer-assisted games and CTC battlefield testing will surely show the limitations of long-range fires. We should not do the testing just at the NTC, a sterile background tailor-made for deep battle, just as were the deserts of Iraq. The testing should also be on terrain much more representative of potential conflict areas — inhabited, partially urbanized, partially forested, with a variety of ongoing human activities other than warfare occurring — places like Vietnam, Panama City, Grenada, Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia — like the Joint Readiness Training Center. The OPFOR there intermingles with the innocent populace — a low-tech tactic proven to confuse high-tech armies. Of course, anytime our long-range fires kill innocent life by mistake,

the CNN player will "broadcast" the pictures to an outraged public, forcing policy and targeting changes on the Blue Force commander.

I predict that "experiments" of this sort will also show that a new form of the combined arms team will emerge. All arms will play to their strengths. For example, the armored force will drive the organized enemy forces away from the population centers and afford the troopers who still have to go into harm's way reasonable levels of protection. The other element of the combined arms team will be the Special Forces and light infantry forces, who engage in civic action and small-unit, high-intensity actions, the night ambush patrols and security mission, all of which allow the populace to enjoy their lives free from the enemy force. A new combined arms team? No, not really, just another form of BG Chaffee's comment of a force of all arms with equal glory for all. Imagine the combined arms team of a Special Forces Group commander with his group, an aviation task force, a light infantry battalion, and an armored battalion task force. A combined arms team, yes indeed!

We are prisoners of our paradigms. For centuries, Western warriors have designed armies to meet on open fields where they are to destroy a target-rich enemy array. This kind of warfare is becoming increasingly rare, for a variety of reasons, and is not likely to make a comeback any time soon. Most of our foes will not conveniently don distinctive uniforms, separate themselves from the populace, and motor around in dense arrays of distinctive vehicles, offering themselves up for the slaughter. Our more likely opponents for the foreseeable future will hide in the towns, among their supporters, wearing us down in a low-tech struggle we'd rather not fight. As we design the future Army, let us not be prisoners of the past.

Dominant maneuver by armored forces may not be the same thing in different areas, but that is what armored forces will bring to the battlefield. We will destroy organized enemy units or drive them away. We will act with relative impunity as we overmatch other potential opponents, while we protect our troopers. Dominance of a battle area will allow other members of the combined arms team to accomplish their missions by enhancing the strengths of the units within the combined arms team, the total being greater than the sum of the parts. Being involved with warfare personally, and on the ground, accomplishes one other extremely important role in the place war occupies within human interaction.

R.E. Lee, on Marye's Heights after the battle of Fredericksburg, said that it was good that war was so terrible lest we grow too fond of it. Distant killing does raise moral issues. The personal nature of combat diminishes, and we must think of that effect. Will it become too easy to conduct operations because we commit machines, as opposed to troopers? The farther away we get from the close fight, the more we forget our machines are killing other people. War becomes clean for us. War must remain a matter of horror, and close combat is necessary to preserve humanity.

I return to the original question, what will maneuver forces bring to the modern future battlefield? The armored force will continue to bring the capability for decisive maneuver, speed, mobility, and shock effect. This is happening now in Bosnia, happened in Haiti, and did not happen soon enough in Somalia. Armored forces operate in all terrain (find a copy of then MG Starry's work on armor in Vietnam) and can dominate that terrain, from rubber plantations, to urban areas, to open plains. The sensor-shooter link can be shortened as we will, but to really dominate ground we have to put troopers on it. Low-tech societies believe what they can see, and the Stealth can't be seen (unless it is raining!). Troopers on the ground, with armored vehicles, lend the unmistakable aspect of power to a situation. In the, thankfully rare, conventional wars of the future, our ability to destroy forces without closing into tank cannon range will save our troopers' lives, and I vote for that. But the wars of the future will not be in the desert and the open sterile terrain, the "tactician's dream, and logistician's nightmare" described by Rommel.

Troopers will still be required to go into harm's way on ground that will be "tank country" because armored forces are there. Armored forces will continue to bring speed, mobility, and shock effect to the battlefield. Our position as armored force officers will remain as advocates of the combined arms team and the advantages of dominant maneuver with forces that seize and hold ground.

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